

Almira Hess - And As Far As What I Wanted & Other Poems



*Almira Hess. Ills.: Joseph
Sassoon Semah*

And As Far As What I Wanted

And as far as I wanted to further explain to you
what every sign says.

After all, surely you understand the way of colors,
the gilded light, the chlorophyll light,
the light of pain and the light of need and vigilant light
and the light of an arc in the sky
splitting through again to seed with drops of sun suddenly burning
the essence of yearning.

The light of the eyes of the dogs
shine loyalty in the dark to their masters.

The growing shadow of darkness placed late
in fading time.

How the radiant blackness disseminates its night
And how the arrows' whiteness smothers its light
How everything is lucid from so much pain.

- Translated from the Hebrew by Yonina Borvick

From And The Moon Drips Madness

There was a time
when I'd have said:
I won't defile myself
with this contemptible Orient,
I'll relegate my ancestral
home to oblivion,
my mother's owlsh visage
weeping over the ruins,
my father's face like a cherub-
the Lord - graced him not.

And I also said:
The West, for instance,
Has no cares to its spirit,
well-done within, singed to the shrouds.
East and West I'll set out in a strong beat
for there is no ark
to bestir myself, if daughter
departs more spirit
to make eagles soar.

- Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay

Then Slake Him From

Then slake him from
A wineskin flowing and a wineskin of milk and a wineskin of loveliness
Kiss and weep, for the time of loving has come.
Woman-dust-earth seeped into the lust in his touch
Keen after him
Kiss his footprints
Do not bind his freedom.
Place him as a cock
Rising early, at sun's fire,
As a madman, his body screaming desire.

- Translated from the Hebrew by Marsha Weinstein

We're Children Of Atlantis

Remnants alighting from the

sea

immigrant

busts.

And there are brigades of cavalry

stumbling as they gallop.

The golden horse pulls down the priestly vestment

his face resplendent.

Month of May moon

I didn't see moons

months I didn't count days

I just saw blood and took my pulse.

The Lebanon cries out to the cedars of Goshen.

Judah cry not Judah

rotting further in the dust

your eyes veiled

in terror. Dread heaven

sent deloused

municipal decree - cry not Judah.

Don't weep chosen

over the babble in paradise no-land

the poetry of mint stirs

onion poetry of the rock and roll

savagery encircled by "uncles", dances

from the jungle calling TAM TAM TAM

Restore me Oh Lord to my sister's bosom

Set me upon the *gopher* wood

Oh Lord bring me back to the ark of Jeshurun

directly.

Turn my visage on a festive day to a vow of radiant

light good souls holding on to the world's foundation.

Inasmuch as the day breaks
I had been hoping night would fall
to continue sleeping as deeply as possible,
to gird up greater forgetting power to be forgotten
before you, inasmuch as the day breaks to get up
I wasn't oblivious already
because I wanted to go on to utter ruin
more and more,
but didn't have the strength
to ask myself
for e little more sleep without getting up in bed.

Wandering from world to world
Surely even my father would
speak at some point and say -
"All in all dwarf you
has face covered up in specs
wear minimal hat
go on
wear had to the max."

Between tone and slumber
now seems like a passage
from letter to letter
from a high octave *do*
to *sol* on another octave's scale,
coming down many thresholds
face to face within my very being which, after all,
only asked to be born and simply.

Hebrew's a nice language for revolvers one generation to the next
looking for a source out of their slumber
as they tarry upon the hook of retention.
Let it not found favor in my eyes
the realm of my garments overthrown
in the womb of holy scribes from Barazan,

I'm having a hard time finding a way out in origins
sometimes discovering my face by surprise
settling for tricks by the side of the road
crossing over another layer.

Yesterday I dreamt how the Nile rolled over its banks
and I saw the Delta inscribed upon the waters.
As I was still looking for other estuaries I suddenly
beheld interpretations on my palms
and between furrow and furrow
a white line of snow stood out
and the Delta was trampled by the running.
Afterwards the Nile made the warm blue
and if a cycle of time had been shifted
and Mount Ararat was dislodged from its place
barren wastelands stood out covered with lavender
their peaks slightly green.

An armored car behind me
an ancient carriage before me
veering to the right, and the color of mud the color of mine.

I still stumble to catch up with the steps taken before me
the niche has been breached
and sparkling water bathes my face.
And we were kind of an assembly of people
From the first generation unto the great-grandchildren.
My father was absent from this place
since he died while still alive,
and I didn't know if we gave birth,
if only my face was bathed,
if I'm the great-granddaughter,
If I'm a member of the tribe,
if my language is literal
if my lips speak the language of fresh twigs.
(That's how I remembered my anger
at their shutting their intent
to see the Aswan Dam

and the pyramids
from my eyes.)

And I still thought I governed myself that I had come for a little rest
without having to make much effort, except eating and drinking
bundles of lemons growing, pepper trees on the ceiling
I wanted to pick
so mother wouldn't get scared,
but she already took the initiative to go
to the other room, leading to the open field,
causing the sorrow in our hearts to arise anew.
She departs aware that she's going
and I'm aware of her departure.

I'm still disturbed by the form of the lemon that grew on the ceiling
Like a yellow candelabra
and behold, a light is lit in my window.
I didn't reign in the switches
presuming someone always kindles a light in my dreams.
Something turns topsy-turvy,
something runs amok,
the world is posed to change its face,
whether Persian lilac or sprouts of
orchid, whether an abundance of
rolling sandalwood beats
against my window and wakes me to tell
of the Nile's blueness even
more splendid than other blue.

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay*

From The Information Eater

The time of the singing birds will become the depths of poverty

1.

And beyond the unknown
I will yet know we don't know everything
and the thing of totality

that's the black holes
that I burn after you
cloaked face ablaze

and reason for this suffering

2.

I banished the forsaken from myself
and tonight amongst horses neighing like jackals -
how come

3.

if it was possible to give
to the soul via the body
for me to burn unto you without this suffering
spirits in flight perishing to block
the totality of the holes
until we know not

4.

the cycles the cycles their surface like hornets
the cycles why symbiotic
to tell me not to leave the house
not to run about to and fro and to tell me
not knowing whither without where to go no place-

5.

I'm afraid of the library
and what's between its shelves to search in the letters
little birds pain the wings within me

6.

seems to me I'll have a saint's face
and find it had been used sometimes
and there were times I was a memorial flame
and flowers on someone's balcony
needing neither dung nor water
my face from which only a sunflower will emerge
without wasteland -

7.

and under this sun
normally will be bred if it can
without the grief of parental doctrine hit home lying in wait
from my two eyes and my mother's voice as it sings so like an infant pecking
away
and just think my breasts playthings sucked out from sucking
and what milk's left me to give the kids
within a space closed
quite hollowed out to nourish
where both our voices stop
in do re mi-

8.

and all this from that windowsill
I saw the dove brooding over time
and her rounded eyes embroiled lashes
the pulleys entangled within
pyres of melancholy
and longing for the openings out -

9.

and my mother asks: have you got flowers
in the garden
people want to see flower
and when there's a garden in the wastelands of sustenance
in the wilds of that jungle of yours
echoing
I want to see your hair
like a field
in that man's room
so I know you're my daughter -

10.

I am Amira
going in my own captivity
and I have a papa buried on the Mount of Olives

the silence of the hush within me we have in common
and the hair brushing on my neck
if I was his secret
if his silence reigns bound me
without release -

11.

And there is a revolution on my face
as if I had been suddenly formed
and from a shorn lamb I had come to the raiments of favor and grace
and clemency and great reverence before the grief of my existence
in the stratosphere
bottleneck of my soul.

12.

There are waters there are mighty waters
at salt's threshold.

13.

There are tremendous waters
my face is an ocean.

14.

And beneath your beauty if anything happens to me
I will see this night
and we shall gaze
ourselves above like a torch
and the eyes will shed tears in a blaze of fire.

For that's how we are the wind -

And I took upon myself the yoke of your love
to reckon ourselves within the midst of the cry

Until I'd not be able to have left that night
the depths of my shriek's range
that day my mother gave birth to me
instructing my soul that it be thus with me
flying between the dreams

and kindred contentions
given birth into nature's lap
for I was born attorn
and the sudden brilliance of the cord seemed real to me -

15.

And how can one migrate to the inner
depths as over the surface of flesh and blood?
Go in and go out and scandal bangs me -

16.

I'll know and summon you
gather spirit to bind me to the altar
and place your eyes upon me to brand me and hunger for me
to ride
and make it if you want I'll spread
and if not I'll want it open
to come
time diving into buoyancy

- *Translated from the Hebrew by Ammiel Alcalay*

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Border Poets: Translating by Dialogues - Amira Hess

the black hand's palm
the black woman's voice
the old black woman's face,
afraid of a man

don't touch me — if you do
ragged weary Yemenis will gather inside me
in screaming want, trying to move their home's walls,
their dwelling caves, and fly here by magic carpet
I fight off Yemen, the desert south
and the rod of wrath - stay away
because — why me?

and I'm a room of my own body
gasping for breath inside my own turf,
let no strange man come touch me
to taste my skin. A wandering Jew
comes up to my oasis - cool water purifies -
as if immersed in white, I am shined
he polishes away my charcoal and Yemenis

I flee to the caves
and weep the seven days
and ten nights, then put on eye make-up
downing tears and pain
leaving only a void to be orphaned from me too
then I catch ringing laughter
from petals of flowers
and shake myself all
over to get my second wind

- *Translated from Hebrew by Helene Knox and Smadar Lavie*

Amira Hess was born in Baghdad, Iraq to an ancient rabbinical family. She was brought to Israel in 1951, at first living with her family in an immigrant transit camp, and later moving to Jerusalem, where she lives today. Hess worked as secretary in the Foreign Office and in the Government Press Office. Her first book, published in 1984, was awarded the Luria Prize. She received the Prime Minister's Prize in 2005 and the Amichai Prize for Poetry in 2015.
Source: <https://www.ithl.org.il/>

Books Published in Hebrew

POETRY

And the Moon is Dripping Madness, Am Oved, 1984 [Ve-Yareah Notef Shigaon]

Two Horses by the Light Line, Am Oved, 1987 [Shnei Susim al Kav Ha-Or]

The Information Eater, Bitan, 1993 [Bolea Ha-Informatzia]

Yovel, Carmel, 1998

Boulimia of the Soul, Helicon, 2007 [Ha-Bulimia Shel Ha-Neshama]

Tears Without Eyes to be Shed, Am Oved, 2014 [Kmo Bchi She-Ein Lo Einayim Lehibachot]

The Art Of Cooking - Chicken Schnitzel Recipe



The Schnitzel has been brought by the European Jews to Israel, and currently everyone enjoys it!

I visited many households in Israel, and at any time of the day or night one can enjoy a Chicken Schnitzel. The Israeli version of Schnitzel is recognizable because of the white sesame seeds which cover the meat.

True, it might not be the most exciting or unique dish out there, and yet, it is definitely a staple in Israel when compared to the hummus.

Ingredients:

2 to 4 chicken breasts depending on how much you want to make (one can substitute the chicken breasts with chicken thighs for a more juicy fatty version)

flour

2 or 3 eggs

breadcrumbs (panko breadcrumbs are nice for a pleasant crisp)

salt & pepper

paprika powder

sesame seeds

cayenne pepper (if you want it a bit more spicy)

lemon wedges

Preparing the chicken:

First, you should cut the chicken into thin flat slices; you can use a butterfly cutting technique to make them bigger and flatter.

When the flat pieces of chicken are ready, place them in between two sheets of plastic and with a mallet or a hammer give them a good pounding until they are even and flat - you should focus mainly on the thicker parts.

Next, you should prepare three bowls, fill the first bowl with flour, and in the second bowl place two eggs or three eggs and beat them.

As to the third bowl, you should fill it with bread crumbs, add sesame seeds, salt, pepper, and paprika - optionally, you can use cayenne pepper - mix all the ingredients together.

Now, season lightly the chicken with salt and pepper, dredge chicken in flour until the surface is completely covered and shake off the excess flour.

Next, dip the chicken in beaten eggs mixture and then roll it through the breadcrumbs to coat, and make sure the chicken is completely covered and then lightly shake off the excess breadcrumbs.

Repeat the process until all the chicken pieces are done.

Cook the chicken:

Add a healthy layer of cooking oil to a hot skillet, make sure it is not too hot, after all, you do not want the oil to be smoking.

Softly place the pieces of chicken into the hot oil.

Fry the schnitzels for 2 or 3 minutes on each side, until golden brown.

After frying the schnitzel, let it rest on paper towels for a couple of seconds.

Chicken Schnitzel is a perfect dish for lunches, or in the evening!

Very enjoyable with a simple Israeli salad, and some pita bread with Hummus.

Serve with lemon wedges - remember, the squeeze lemon adds so much flavor to the schnitzel.

Tal Nitzan ~ I remember ETTY

Hillesum & The third child



Tal Nitzan. Ills.: Joseph Sassoon Semah

I remember Etty Hillesum

Did she still whisper
"Why anticipate trouble"
when transported from Westerbork
to Auschwitz in Wagon Number 12,
*"They should be exterminated like fleas,
those petty fears of the future"*
as her future rushed towards her
to exterminate her?
Maybe I should pause, retreat
or at least recite
"Why anticipate joy"
as I hurry past the yellow squares of life
that once were far and sealed
and tonight open towards me
to let me in and out as I wish
while a silly hope for happiness
sways like a jug, too large,
on my head

"An interrupted life", the diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943

Translation: Tal Nitzan & Vivian Eden

The third child

I'm your unknown child.

I'm the negative

between your two blue-eyed children
who radiate against my darkness.

I'm your forgotten, your vanished, I'm your
kicked away.

I kneel - while they close their eyes

and reach out their hands for the gift -
as if begging for the blow
that will not come.

I feed on the cocoa trail they leave,
on the rustle of wrappings.

I shrink at night into the corner
of their beds, where tiny stuffed animals
encircle them

like shelter against evil,
lurking for the nocturnal ritual,
when you step on my toes unseeing,
and bend to smoothe their plump blankets.

When you close your eyes
(green like mine!)

I'll creep under your eyelids and murmur:
"Mommy".

If you try to banish the nightmare of my face
you'll find out, shamefully,
you don't even know my name.

Translation: Tal Nitzan & Vivian Eden

Tal Nitzan was born in Jaffa, Israel, and has lived in Argentina, Colombia, and U.S.A. (NY). She currently lives in Tel Aviv.

She is an awardwinning poet, writer, translator of Hispanic literature and editor.

Tal Nitzan published numerous poetry books.

<https://www.facebook.com/IsraelinNY/>

Current Sufism In Israel. The Way Of Abraham - A Bridge Between Religions



*Shelley Elkayam - Ills.:
Joseph Sassoon Semah*

Current Sufism in Israel El Tarika El Ibrahimiyah - The Way of Abraham - A Bridge between Middle East Religions

Introduction

I wish to thank the University of Goettingen for inviting me to lecture at the Intercultural Theology program on the Current Sufism in Israel and on Sephardic Ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel.

I will begin by introducing my subject with some historical background. Then, I would like to make a reference to the specific audience sitting here right now

because it is a very special audience. On the one hand, it is German; on the other, it is an international audience. So we have to consider how do we speak to such a local yet global group.

At that point, I will present the thesis of this lecture.

So, let us now discuss the issue of the Sephardic Jews. Who are they?

The reason why one knows so little about the Sephardic or Oriental Jews is also a matter of scientific concern for those of us who study *Intercultural Theology*. Thus, let us have a quick look at a long and serious matter such as The Stage of History.

Yes, stage as in Stage Theater, with the very writers who write the script and the very actors who play the protagonists and the very hegemonic audience who wish to see themselves on stage, or else the very far exotic other. Then we shall move forward to have an idea about the intellectual assets of the ISRAEL Sufi way and perhaps if time allows, we shall read during our workshop some of the devotional texts studied by the Israel Sufi Way, such as El-Ghazali. So hopefully you should have some taste regarding the intercultural Theology that is bridging between religions in the Middle East today, and we shall conclude with that today.

Background

In the Jewish State of Israel, Sufi activity had been almost eliminated by the disruption of the War in 1948, partly revived after the renewal of contacts between Palestinians in Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza “in the wake of 1967 Arab Israeli War” and suppressed in the Second Intifada, also known as the Oslo War and the Al- Aqsa Intifada (2000 to 2005). This Intifada raged between the 20th and the 21st century.

In this lecture I focus on Sufism in Israel as manifested by The Israeli Sufi Way. The Israeli Sufi Way is known as The Sufi Way of Abraham. In Hebrew - One of Israel's two national languages, it sounds Derekh Avraham (אברהם דרך). In Arabic, the other national language, it sounds Al-Tariqah Ibrahimiyah or Ibrahimiyah-Al (الإبراهيمية الطريقة / א-טריקה אל-אברהמייה).

The members of the Israeli Sufi Way come from various circles: Academy, conservative and orthodox Rabbinic institutes and leadership of other Sufi brotherhoods of Israel: Qadiriyyah, Shadhiliyyah-Yashrutiyyah

and Naqshbandiyyah.

Ibrahimiyyah defines itself (2014) publicly as an inter-religious movement encouraging dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims. This inter-religious character is a “post-Sufi” strategy as well as a spiritual response to the particular modern European challenges of the State of Israel, tackling the Israeli East-West debate.

The Sufi leadership of the 3 Muslim brotherhoods responded to the challenge of the peculiar circumstances in which they live in the Middle East, by joining the Ibrahimiyyah and establishing it as the Israeli Sufi Way of Abraham.

This Israeli Sufi brotherhood was created during the 1990s right at the end of the twentieth century. Public activity gathered momentum during the first decade of the twenty first century, with a double mission of both peace between Jews and Muslims, and spiritual search for Medieval Jewish Sufi roots. Special attention is given to 16th century Safed (in the Land of Israel) and of Egypt and North Africa and since the Sufi festival in 2010 also to Indian Jewish Sufism of perhaps 12 century.

Here and Now

We have in the audience 60 students of Prof. Andreas Grunschloss of the Faculty of the History of Religion and on the other hand 30 international students of Prof. Fritz Heinrich Intercultural Theology program of the Theological Faculty of Goettingen University.

Therefore, my lecture relates to both the historical and theological dimensions of this phenomenon, which I consider to be a capsule of Jewish Muslim spiritual brotherhood. It is true that The Way of Abraham was established only in the 1990s. And yet we should ask whether it is indeed *a new religious movement*. New or old, this is the question.

While this particular initiative has a local - and a national - Israeli context, as a Jewish-Muslim initiative it is also part of a larger scope. The Israeli Sufi Way interfaces with an inter-religious trans-local context that emerged during the 20th Century. It should also be looked at in the international context of an International and Intercultural Sufism that emerged in the USA and Europe. Ibrahimiyyah is a new religious movement in that sense that it is committed generally to the mystical spirituality of Sufism, while departing it from

any established religion.

Looking at the Israeli Sufi Way in the Israeli context, it is a “glocal” phenomenon. In other words, Ibrahimiyah is a global yet local movement. It is a manifestation of two opposite powers: on the one hand, the social and political Israeli realms of Dialogue and Peace movements and on the other, it belongs with the fundamental realms of religious Revival and Jewish Renewal.

We have to remember that this order or brotherhood is not an official institution. It is not registered as a non-profit or a religion. Therefore it features a built-in flexibility and reflects changes in the view of its members as it lives on.

Hence, what began as *Derekh Avraham*, the Sufi Way of Abraham, first in Hebrew and then in Arabic, is more and more referred to by its members as “the Israeli Sufi Way.” This gradual change reflects a not-always-conscious tendency to focus mainly inwards, to the Jews themselves. So the Israeli Sufi way, which was for many years Jewish Muslim movement, is often turning more toward Jews in Israel, the Jewish State and beyond, to the Jewish world.

The Ibrahimiyah is still working tightly with Muslim teachers and friends, but it is also gradually developing a typically Jewish Sufism. It is calling Israelis to look at the very Jewish Medieval origins of Sufism and to take a moderate perspective [toward their faith]. It invites Jews to refrain from looking at things in a clear cut, black and white, perspective. This is no little challenge for a culture famous for its inclination to heated arguments and even bickering.

So Ibrahimiyah appears to go against Jewish tradition and the fundamental nature of Orthodox Judaism. But this is not really the case. It does stand on a firm ground of medieval (and even Biblical) Jewish tradition.

Indeed, unity of opposites is no stranger to both Hebrew and Muslim classical Sufi mystical traditions. (Ibn Arabi’s *wahdat al-wujud*, unity of the being, *وحدة الوجود*).

They experience silence in the midst of noise, Love in the midst of hate, hope in the midst of despair.

My thesis

Considering, theologically, the 4 major criteria of Moshe Sharon for new religious movements

- Holly new book
- Holly New Schedule\Days

- Holy new Spiritual figure
- New Religious Praxis

I would argue that the Israel Sufi Way is an NRM if one considers Judaism since Safed 16th century as an NRM, which I doubt would one do.

But that is a matter of study for another occasion.

From an intellectual-historical perspective, one should consider mainly developments within the Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish traditions.

Mizrahi/Oriental signifies Jews dwelling in area occupied by the Muslims in the 7th century while Sephardic refers to Jews who were forced to leave the Iberian peninsula following Expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

(Sephardic means originating from Sepharad, Spain or the Iberian Peninsula.) These terms are largely (but not entirely) overlapping, namely referring to the same communities.

Here I refer mainly to developments, which occurred in 16th Century Safed as well as North Africa, India and Egypt since 12th century on.

I argue that the Intercultural Theology of the Israel Sufi Way (i.e. the contents of the gatherings as reflected in the selection of Sufi and Kabbalistic texts mainly from 12th and 16th centuries, translated and studied by Ibrahimiyah) — clearly demonstrates The Israel Sufi way is not as a mere political peace movement. Rather, it is a thorough-going spiritual-intellectual movement of Jews who seek to remember and re-connect with their own forgotten heritage. This is a group of people who seek to discover their own genuine Jewish Sufi origins and sources.

I will argue that this forgetfulness was imposed on the Sephardic Jewish culture by forces of the Israeli-Arab conflict, European modernity, Westernization, and by Ashkenazi secular categories.

My thesis is that the Way of Abraham has combined the local El Qadiri [i] and Shadhili Yashruti [ii] tradition and the Naqshbandiyya [iii] tradition with a renewal Jewish import from Medieval Jewish Sufism not as a new religious movement but as a way for Mizrahim, for Sephardim, to live in the Middle East in a good spirit and in neighboring relations with the religions of the Middle East Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the new spiritualities that are currently coming from the Indian peninsula.

Who are the Sephardic Jews?

They are the Jews who find themselves in Medieval Spain creating a great Jewish culture and religious Jewish texts in Hebrew. According to Daniel Elazar, the Sephardi were the Majority of Jews, about 95%, at the 11th century yet in the recent centuries they are not the majority of Jews as most Jews in Europe and in the USA and Canada are not Sephardi but Ashkenazi.

In Israel until the 1990s, the majority were Sephardic Jews. These Jewish Israelis identified themselves as Mizrahim (Orientals) mainly since 1983. Yet, recent studies by Ben Dor and Behar traced the use of the term Mizrahim as identity marker (at least of some Sephardi intellectuals), already from 1910.

Thus, again, we are talking about the same people as we say both, Sephardim or Mizrahim.

The Stage of History

Historically, there is no one Sephardi History, as there are many Sephardi Histories; each Sephardic Jewish community has its own History. Not because the Sephardic Jews did not have an intellectual discourse of reading and writing. They definitely did read a lot and wrote quite much, more than any other Jewish group.

Yet, the unfolding of history was such that the history of the Sephardic Jews was not yet staged on the Stage of History. While they wrote, quite a lot, scholarship on the history of Sephardi Jews during the last 70 years leaves much to be desired. One needs to set a new stage with new historical tools, combining philological research with the research of Folklore studies.

Who sets the Script Unfolded on the Stage of History?

I want you to close your eyes. Imagine there is a stage of *History* where the protagonists you know are active and vivid such are the Jews, the Christians, The Muslims, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Hindus, the Buddha, the Maya.

But when you look for the Sephardic Jews, they are not to be found on the Stage of Jewish history. They are largely ignored by mainstream historiography.

They are periods associated with the Sephardic Jews such as the Golden Age in Spain, the Expulsion from Spain 1492, Safed 16th Century, The Damascus Blood Liber of 1840, the Sephardic immigration from the Islamic countries into the new State of Israel in 1948.

All these dramatic periods relate to each other in revival and in survival. They serve as important turning points in Jewish history. Yet, they are largely hidden from the eye.

In Safed in the 16th century, I would argue, the Modern Jewish way was designed and shaped the way we know it today. Yet, the secrets of Kabbalah of Safed made the History of Safed remain hidden and unseen for hundreds of years. (Kabbalah, Jewish esoteric learning, is not easily accessible).

But the story of the past did not disappear altogether. 16th century Safed (a Jewish center now in Northern Israel and then within the Ottoman Empire) is my field of expertise. Safed was the showground of an intensive creative intellectual history for the Jews. Yet this history was largely hidden from the mainstream historians. Why was this history so difficult to trace and understand?

Was that a mystery? No. It is a subject for an analysis. I assume we all see through dichotomies. Black and White, Blue and Red, Right and Left. Isn't it?

I would argue that this may be explained by the inherent limitation of the dominant way of thinking, which applies dichotomies. This Yes/No thinking as Secular versus Religious, Mysticism versus Religious Law, and even Allah versus Eloha, The God of Israel. That is why the Sephardic Jewish way of life was—to a large extent—misunderstood and perhaps even misrepresented.

Yet, once we are able to overcome this kind of black and white way of thinking, we kind find the way to understand and understand this Sephardic tradition. This is a tradition that builds bridges between Middle Eastern Religions today, because when Allah and God are one, the bridge is set for the religions to mutual respect.

My first argument today is that the Way of Abraham is powerful case study for this perspective.

The Sephardic Ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel are typically affiliated with the Shas Movement. Shas (Hebrew: ש"ס, an acronym for שומרי ספרד Shomrei Sfarad, lit., ("Religious) Guardians of the Sephardim") is an ultra- Orthodox movement and also a religious political party in Israel. The Shah movement was founded in 1984 under the leadership of the illustrious (Iraqi) Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

Sephardic Jews of the Shas Movement adhere—in terms of religious practice—to the interpretation of Jewish Law (Halacha) by Rabbi Yosef Karo. Indeed, Rabbi

Yosef Karo authored his famous Halachic compendium of laws, Shulkhan Arukh (literally meaning “A Set Table”), in 16th century Safed.

In other words, Sephardi Jews have a set of laws that is different from the Ashkenazi (European) one.

Most important particularly when it comes to the Ultra-Orthodox camp, is the deep divide between the secular and the religious that we find among the Ashkenazi.

To say the least, the Sephardic Jews, even those who hold to modern norms, were not subject to the modern dichotomy between secular and religious. It is within the Ottoman Empire that 90% of the Sephardic Jews lived for generations. So while many would refer to Sephardic Jews as Arab Jews the truth of the matter would be that they are Jews under the Ottomans rule.

That is Turkish Jews in a way.

One has to remember that the separation of Church and State is originally European and Christian. It began with Jesus quoted as saying: “Render therefore unto Caesar, the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God’s, the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21)

It then evolved into an ever growing dichotomy beginning with the Renaissance and later during the enlightenment. European modernity required a dramatic separation from many aspects of religion. Church and state were to be fully separated.

Not so in the Ottoman environment, where modernity continued alongside religion.

With the encounter of West and East, the secular outlook became also the colonialist outlook. European secularism became a tool for breaking and deconstructing the unified politico-religious heritage of the Sephardic communities.

Within modern Israeli culture one often finds an Orientalist outlook of the Sephardim, as explained by Meir Buzaglo. On the other hand, Sephardic Jews in Israel also became as source and a force of an underground creativity in the Arts, culture and intellect, as explained by Ammiel Alcalay and Haviva Pedaya.

Intellectual Account

The concept of the Israeli Sufi Way emerged - or reemerges - in the face of Israeli-Arab conflict. While the challenge of peace is structured in this effort, it differs from other Israeli peace movements such as the well-known (mainly Ashkenazi) Peace Now movement. The Peace Now movement (עכשיו שלום Shalom Achshav) was launched in 1978 as an all-Israeli movement aimed at supporting the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, but later became more and more sectorial, representing mainly leftists of European origin.

To illustrate the difference let us look tomorrow into the lyrics of the devotional text studied by the Ibrahimiyah.

We will study that at our workshop tomorrow.

Let us focus on the 5th Source of the 3rd chapter in the poem of Al Ghazali which is a devotional text for the Way of Abraham.

El-Ghazali, a devotional text studied by the Ibrahimiyah:

In the name of Illah, the merciful, the compassionate

The prayer and the peace

Upon Our Master Muhammad

And upon His beloved and pure family and friends

Oh Lord!

Have mercy on us

For Thou art the merciful Father

Forgive us

The evil of our passions

And our wrongdoing

Oh Lord!

Thou art peace

And from Thee doth peace emanate

And to Thee shall peace return

Bless us, oh Lord, with peace

Oh Lord!

Guide Thy creations to their success

So that their deed shall be blessed

And cause them to love each other

May the Lord bestow plenty of bounty

On all of men's doings

*Oh Lord!
Avert wars and misfortunes
From Thy created beings
And take them closer to Thee
Oh Lord!
Oh Lord of the Worlds!
Amen and amen.*

This text demonstrates the complexity of Ibrahimiyyah as a Jewish-Muslim gathering in the midst of the Jewish-Arab conflict, since the year 2000 up to now.

In a search for God, Ibrahimiyyah members call for peace which involves love, mercy and regret. But suchlike classical Kabbalistic and Sufi texts abound among the readings and theosophical study and practice of Ibrahimiyyah: Al-Rumi, Al Ghazali, Al Qushayri, Attar, and Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi - all are common names in the Tariqa.

But this is not all.

The transformation of Ibrahimiyyah from a focus on classical Sufi and Medieval Jewish texts into Sufism of the 21 Century is accompanied by the new media, using emails, blogs and Facebook.

Since 2000, members of the Way of Abraham are at the forefront of forming a new intellectual and Academic public Hebrew sphere, which is Islam-friendly. This is done by translating books, poetries and works, by writing PhD dissertations with no institutional budgets, and by participating in panels and conferences. Ibrahimiyyah members used for years to meet weekly in Tel Aviv within each academic year since 2000. There are also three annual conferences being held in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Neve Shalom.

And when the Shadhili Yashruti Shaykh opened the doors of the Sufi lodge (Zawiyah) in Acre [Akko], the Ibrahimiyyah has gathered in Hanukkah too, for a celebration. This annual Hanukkah celebration is centered on light in Jewish and Muslim traditions. And includes Hanukkah sermons by Muslim Shaikhs, perhaps a first in history of religions.

One has to remember that while Hanukkah is a festival of lights, it is also a nationalistic Jewish holiday that commemorates the great Maccabean or

Hasmonean Revolt (Hebrew: 167) (החשמונאים מרד) to 160 BC). Its religious significance revolves around the purification of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Not a light thing, to have Palestinian Muslims regularly contribute to such an event.

Occasionally, Ibrahimiyah hosts visiting Sufi Shaykhs from the USA, Albania or Turkey. Considering the fact that Ibrahimiyah has no lodge (zawiya) of its own, it has been expanding for about twenty years, around 30 to 70 active adherents were assembled, most of them belonging to the Academia and to artistic and intellectual circles in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Galilee. All of the participants are organized into a formal study group in which they discuss their spiritual experiences over Sufi texts.

Ibrahimiyah became an active Sufi order in Israel. With weekly meetings held in Neve Tzedek Tel Aviv tens of members gathered at the ally in the house of Rabbi Roberto Arbib and his wife Dr. Marina Arbiv. Some of the seminars were held at the Masorti synagogue Sinai at Gordon Street and soon weekend conferences followed.

From its very beginning, since its establishment in the presence of Shaykhs, Rabbis, Poets, Academics and a large audience who gathered at the Jewish-Arabic village of Neve Shalom in 2000, the Ibrahimiyah adapted the dhikr ceremony as a common prayer, as a remembering practice of enlightening the heart, and as a spiritual call.

The Manasra family and disciples lead the dhikr ceremony in the gatherings. Thus the Ibrahimiyah dhikr ceremony includes foundations from the Qadiri dhikr as well as a devotional song in Hebrew composed by Rabbi Nathan, that follows the melody of the prayed La Ilaha Illa Allah and performed by Rabbi Roberto Arbib in the end of each Ibrahimiyah dhikr:

There is none like our God

There is none like our Lord

There is none like our King

There is none like our Savior [La Illah Ila Allah]

Who is like our God

Who is like our Lord

Who is like our King

Who is like our Savior

*Let us praise our God
Let us praise our Lord
Let us praise our King
Let us praise our Savior
Blessed be our God
Blessed be our Lord
Blessed be our King
Blessed be our Savior
Lo, Thou art our God
Lo, Thou art our Lord
Lo, Thou art our King
Lo, Thou art our Savior*

The specific contribution of the leadership of the Ibrahimiyah for fourteen years was a weekly gathering of study of Sufi scriptures, in Hebrew, under the guidance of Muslim Sufi Shaykh and of Dr. Avi Elqayam, as well as a practice of a *dhikr*. Ibrahimiyah performs musical improvisations, devotional poetry, whirling dance and prayers.

This involved translations of Sufi classical corpus from Arabic into Hebrew. Indeed Elqayam and the Ghassan, the son of Shaykh Manasra, translated major classical Sufi works as well as researched into the [forgotten]works of the Jewish Sufis. Following an intensive decade of Sufi praxis, Shaykh Manasra who had been nominated in 1995 as the Qadiri Shaykh of the Holy Land by the Sufi Shaykh of Al-Aqsa Muhammad Hashem Al Baghdadi, initiated in 2008-2009 five of the Israeli Jewish Sufi leaders - whom he attributed as carrying exceptional character and scholarly achievements - as Shaykhs of The Ibrahimiyah. Along with his son Ghassan and his grandson Abed Al Salam, Manasra guides the *dhikr* ceremonies and teaches the Sufi texts and poetry.

Conclusion

I argued in this paper that the Ibrahimiyah is holding a specific practice that corresponds with Islamic traditional.

So we have here an inter-faith peace oriented efforts with Muslim and Jewish activists working together, often with members of other faiths.

Yet, the Israeli Sufi Way of Abraham is turning largely inwards, to the Jews themselves. They present an alternative view of combining region and modernly

that draws on the heritage of Sephardic Judaism. Both as a tradition that avoids the pitfall of dichotomy between modernity and religion and as a tradition that has much in common with Islam.

Sephardic Judaism traditionally kept its channels open to interaction and inspiration from both the European-Christian and the Levantine-Muslim worlds. Ashkenazi Jews followed the European model, which led to a great split between secular modern Jews and the Ultra-Orthodox. This tendency to think in dichotomies, the either/or paradigm, made reconciliation with Muslim Arabs more difficult. It also forced the Sephardi Jews to stay under the radar for a very long time, in the name of an imaginary “melting-pot”.

But the Israeli Sufi Way—and similar movements—present an alternative. Making Judaism more tuned to both Europe and the Levant. Thus, forming an alternative modernity to the fully secular West, and challenging the hegemonic Ashkenazi Judaism of Israel, in both its variations, the modern-secular and the Ultra-Orthodox.

And, at the same time, the Sufi Way opens the hearts of Israeli and other Jews to Muslims, Christians and Druze and others. The Ibrahimiyyah contributes to bringing peace to our region via a spiritually intensive grass-root effort.

Other important corollaries are also academic work, new discoveries and a lot of happiness in lightly-social and deeply-religious gatherings of all sorts.

Notes:

[i] From the Qadiri point of view their active support in establishing the Ibrahimiyyah might be seen as a strategy to survive.

Under the circumstances of living under a Jewish government since the 1948 War, the Sufi Qadri brotherhood declined, yet it was “partly revived after the renewal of contacts with the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in the wake of the 1967 War”, and roads to these contacts were blocked again after the Second Intifada.

Dr. Avi Elqayam of Bar Ilan University, Prof. Paul Fenton of the University of Paris Sorbonne and the Masorti [Conservative] Rabbi Roberto Arbib of Tel Aviv, were looking for a Sufi Shaykh. They visited Shaykh Dir Kadis of the Palestinian Authority, and the Shaykh of Rammla Abu Labban of the Rifa'iyah, who took them to Gaza to meet the great Shaykh of Rifa'iyah. The last paid then a visit when he

came to teach a seminar in the first gathering at Neve Shalom. Yet, Shaykh Abd Al Salam Manasra and his family were committed enough to teach the Ibrahimiyah on a weekly basis for 14 years already. Thus Shaykh Manasra is one of the founders of Ibrahimiyah. As with spiritual-historical events, one has to cross few versions about how it all started. According to Shaykh Manasra, at the late 90's one of his disciples, Imam Khalid Abu-Ras met with Dr. Avi Elqayam at an international conference. Abu-Ras was talking about him, and following this, the Jewish leaders of Ibrahimiyah. Dr. Elqayam, and Rabbi Roberto Arbib and Dr. Itzchak Weismann came to see the Shaykh in Nazareth. He recalls these days: When Abu Ras spoke about me, Elqayam did not leave him until he gave him the contact details, and I heard he asked would the Shaykh be angry if I will call him? [They came to me and] We spoke about Sufism and love of people. They asked me "Do we have to be Muslims? And I answered "If we would have forced you [Jews] to become Muslim than we would have not been [deserved to be called] Sufis. You can become Sufis without being Muslims, [because] what is Sufism? It is love, it is help. It is giving without receiving.

Long time ago, once, in the beginning of Derech Avraham [Ibrahimiyah] Elqayam asked me whether or not "we have to be Muslims". I answered him "not at all". There are fifteen million Jews and One and half milliard Muslims, so why should we take the Jews. Let the Jews stay Jews. We need peace to be amongst us. To think not make a problem to the other. For us in Islam Peace is God, This is one of the names of God. If we think of peace then we think of love of God. Avi Elqayam said to me once, four-five years ago, during an argument "We in the Way of Abraham". [But] I made the Way of Abraham. With us to make a Way is a Sufi matter. Who is not a Sufi can't make a Way. Making a way is a matter of bringing hearts near each other and to walk together in one way. I did not wish Jews to become Muslims and Muslims to become Jews. So we made The Way of Abraham, because there is no leader in the Israeli Qadiri Sufism but me. Even though professors ...because they need first to receive [the hirka] from a Shaykh. And Shaykh Muhammad Hashem Al Baghdadi passed on to me the Hirka.

I meant the Way of Abraham to be that the Jews will stay Jews and Muslims to stay Muslims and Christians to stay Christians.

We aimed for love to prevail, for peace and for humanitarianism."

[ii] The Yashrutiyya founded in Acre by the Tunisian Shadhili-Madani Shaykh 'Ali Nur al-Din Yashruti (1815-1899) in the mid-nineteenth century. The Shadhili Yashruti Shaykh lives in Amman yet the Shadhili Yashruti in Acre host in their

beautiful zawiya cultural and social panels on the Architecture of Light and on Inner Mystical Journey in Kabbalah and in Sufi Mysticism. With Shadhili Yashruti support the Ibrahimiyyah turned their Jewish holiday of Hanukkah into an inter-religious festival of light (النور معمارية), as its secret Sufi teachings.

[iii] The head of the Naqshbandi Sufi order in Jerusalem, Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Bukhari, a Muslim leader of the Ibrahimiyyah. Shaykh Abdel Aziz Buchari adhered to the orthodox position held by Naqshbandis and Salafis alike, that Islam is the final religion; on the other hand, however, he was active in the inter-religious understanding movement and participated in many interfaith conferences, even to an extent that it cost him lose his job from which he earned his living. Shaykh Abdel Aziz Bukhari was pointing out that the three Abrahamic religions stem from one common source, and in a lecture at Bar Ilan University at a course on Sufism he maintained that all denominations are different traditions of the one universal religion. In harmony with this position he claimed that he has been long engaged in interfaith dialogue, taking part in various conferences in the Holy Land especially Tarika Ibrahimiyyah and the Sulha and Jerusalem Hug as well as conferences around the world, and hosting delegations in his Naqshbandiyya compound in Jerusalem. To the end of the first decade of the 21 century the neighborhood took over the Naqshbandiyya awiya in Jerusalem and turned it into a mosque. The Naqshbandiyya at the Holy Land was not as active as in Turkey and Syria, yet Shaykh Abdel Aziz Buchari has been long characterized by his modern and universal da'wa of Love and Peace that appealed to Sufis from the West, who made pilgrims to Shaykh Abdel Aziz Buchari home at the Old City of Jerusalem. His lectures combined a strong orthodoxy with an interfaith and interreligious understanding. He was willing to teach Quran and Islam to Israelis and to Jewish members of Tarikka Ibrahimiyyah with respect to their search for their own Jewish Sufi origins. Shaykh Abdel Aziz home in East Jerusalem became a center for international delegations from many Western countries around. He was an Ambassador for Peace and traveled extensively to meetings and conferences around the globe, from Tunis and Morocco to Turkey and England and the United States. Shaykh Abdel Aziz Bukhari was attacked in his own Sufi compound in Jerusalem by his sister. He died in June 1st 2010.

Ammiel Alcalay - After Jews And Arabs. Remaking Levantine Culture



*Ammiel Alcalay - Ills.:
Joseph Sassoon Semah*

Abstract

By exposing the rich and diverse textual and cultural legacy of this time and space, Alcalay reassesses the exclusion of Semitic culture in Europe from the perspective of contemporary Arabic culture and opposing images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This book will compel a revision of Jewish studies by placing contemporary Israeli culture within its Middle Eastern context and the terms of colonial, postcolonial, and multicultural discourse.

Introduction

The modern myth of the Jew as pariah, outsider and wanderer has, ironically enough, been translated into the postmodern myth of the Jew as “other,” an other that collapses into the equation: writing = Jew = Book. By what sleight of hand? Metaphor? Metaphysics? Such an exclusive address (whether it is an open or a closed book) ultimately obscures the necessity of mapping out a space in which the Jew was native, not a stranger but an absolute inhabitant of time and place. The urgency of reiterating not only the memory but the possibility of such a world

can be felt most acutely now, upon the present scene, where the political context of “the people of the Book” has undergone a radical transformation while the terms used to record and interpret their history and culture have not only remained static but even regressed into a kind of fixed, iconic solidity.

Writing and reading—interpretation—no matter where, have a lot to do with the unearthing, the grasp, the mastery of and giving over to both presences and absences: reading as recovery and relapse; the ink of writing as lifeblood, animator, nourishment—the book as fertile ground nurtured by ink. But the “furrow,” the “fold” that may be both “history” and the “Jew,” runs the risk of diffusion, dispersion, and, finally, inertia. Like anything that looms large in a people’s memory, this field can become muddy, and these furrows turn to drainage ditches that empty out into a stillborn swamp, final resting place for what is allowed to go un- questioned, uninterpreted, and unrelated to social fact or present circum- stance. Paradoxically, the movement of memory too often reappears in the form of inert, unyielding images: resilient and indelible, their clarity is blinding. In his Commentary on the Mishnah, also known as *The Eight Chapters*, Maimonides wrote:

One action may resemble another action, so that the two actions are thought to be identical even though they are not. For example, consider three dark places: the sun shines upon one of them, and it is illumined; the moon rises over the second place, and it is illumined; a lamp is lit in the third place, and it is illumined. Light is found in each one of them, but the reason for the first light and its cause is the sun, the cause of the second is the moon, and the cause of the third is fire. . . . There is no notion common to all of them except through equivocation. Grasp this notion, for it is extraordinarily marvelous.

History, with its rigid paradigms of order, comes to shore up the insecure ramparts of a failing memory. Untangling the strands of the past—or submitting to their confusing but exhilarating intricacy— cannot simply be an act of recognition, of fitting events into fixed patterns, of just seeing the light. It must begin, rather, by apprehending the sources of light and the present objects they shade or illuminate, and follow with an active, incessant engagement in the process of naming and renaming, covering and uncovering, consuming and producing new relations, investigating hierarchies of power and effect: distilling light into sun, moon, and fire. Just as maps interpret and redefine terrain in the im- age of their makers, readings can yield both past and prospective orders: in

the Crimean port of Theodosia, not far (in mind) “from Smyrna and Baghdad,” Osip Mandelstam wrote of a “bookish earth” and dreamt of a place that, within the inherited wisdom of its people, embodied an allegiance to words. Sentenced to internal exile, Mandelstam placed the form of his vision and the memory of his biblical ancestry in a Mediterranean world in which Spain and, even more specifically, Andalusia was central: sowing dormant seeds, he unearthed his own genealogy.

[...]

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The complete book (PDF): <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/31473>

Ella Shohat - Dislocated Identities: Reflections Of An Arab-Jew



*Ella Shohat - Ills.: Joseph
Sassoon Semah*

When issues of racial and colonial discourse are discussed in the United States, people of Middle Eastern and North African origin are often excluded. This piece

is written with the intent of opening up the multicultural debate, going beyond the U.S. census's simplistic categorization of Middle Eastern peoples as "whites." Provoked by the Gulf War, my personal narrative questions the Eurocentric opposition of Arab and Jew, particularly the denial of Arab-Jewish (Sephardic) voices both in the Middle Eastern and American contexts.

I am an Arab-Jew. Or, more specifically, an Iraqi Israeli woman living, writing and teaching in the United States. Most members of my family were both and raised in Baghdad, and now live in Iraq, Israel, the United States, England, and Holland. When my grandmother first encountered Israeli society in the '50s, she was convinced that the people who looked and ate so differently—the European-Jews—were actually European-Christians. Jewishness for her generation was inextricably associated with Middle Easternness. My grandmother, who still lives in Israel and still communicates largely in Arabic, had to be taught to speak of "us" as Jews and "them" as Arabs. For Middle Easterners, the operating distinction has always been "Muslim," "Jew" and "Christian," not Arab versus Jew. The assumption was that "Arabness" referred to a common shared culture and language, albeit with religious differences.

The complete essay:

https://www.academia.edu/Dislocated_Identities_Reflections_of_an_Arab_Jew

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